



## CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY

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## **KEY HIGH-SPEED TRAIN ALIGNMENTS GET ADVISORY APPROVAL *Despite Milestone, Board Alarmed Over Funding Needed to Finalize EIR***

**Los Angeles, CA** – During its public meeting held yesterday, the California High-Speed Rail Authority Board (CHSRA) gave their advisory approval — pending final analysis of public and agency comments — of three key route alignments for California's high-speed train system. While recognizing the significance of the steps they are now taking, Board and staff members also raised doubts that the environmental review process could be completed within this fiscal year under their current budget. This, despite coming in under budget for the environmental review process to date.

At the meeting the board considered staff recommendations on the following:

- Selecting the alignment through Palmdale to connect Los Angeles to Bakersfield
- Selecting the alignment to Irvine to connect Los Angeles to San Diego via Orange County
- Undertaking additional studies to select an alignment connecting the Central Valley to the Bay Area
- Use existing transportation networks to connect high-speed train to LAX

"The environmental review process worked. It did exactly what it was intended to do – engage public agencies and the general public, identify areas that need further study, and validate existing technical data," said Joe Petrillo, CHSRA chair.

The board's advisory vote allows staff to start responding to public comments. The formal vote on these and other alignments will take place at the CHSRA's December board meeting.

"This has been an environmental review process unlike any other – a truly monumental undertaking – and we are excited by the high level of public interest," said Petrillo. "To achieve this level where we are deciding on the alignments and station locations is a milestone for the project, the first of its kind in the nation to proceed to this level of planning."

"With only a three-person staff to move this enormous planning process as quickly as it has happened is truly remarkable. Yet, we are now seeing the affects of budget cuts. The good news is

we're under budget so far and there is a collaborative effort to find funds for additional Central Valley to Bay Area studies. The bad news is, even with funding for those studies, we won't be able to finish the EIR without additional funds. Now it's time for interested parties who have contributed to the planning process to make their voices heard in Sacramento, so that the Legislature and Administration continues to fund this vital project," said Petrillo.

CHSRA staff presented the board with a summary of the public and resource agency comments received – more than 2,000 total – which, combined with the technical studies, contributed to their recommendations.

An alignment connecting the Central Valley with the Bay Area proved particularly challenging, according to staff.

"While our existing technical studies tell us that we've identified the most profitable and geographically feasible alignments that do not require a new crossing over the Bay, we've heard loud and clear that stakeholders in this area want additional alignments studied to further weigh the environmental consequences of each," said Mehdi Morshed, CHSRA executive director.

Staff recommended a program-level environmental impact report (EIR/EIS) specifically on the Central Valley to Bay Area alignment (Northern Mountain Crossing in EIR documents) so further studies can be done to identify a preferred alignment. The study will look at all alignment options between Pacheco Pass in the south and through the Altamont Pass in the north. This next-tier study would not include alignment options through Henry Coe State Park.

Staff said that this process is not expected to delay the project – assuming funding can be secured for the anticipated \$1.7 million it will take to complete the study of this alignment.

For the Los Angeles to Bakersfield connection (Southern Mountain Crossing in EIR documents), Authority staff recommended the route through the Antelope Valley with a station in Palmdale.

"While this option adds about 10 minutes to the express travel service and has fewer intercity ridership numbers, it's less expensive to build and provides direct service to the Antelope Valley – L.A. County's fastest growing city. Los Angeles and Palmdale showed substantial support for this alignment option and it has fewer environmental impacts, less challenging terrain and is less subject to earthquakes according to technical documents and public comment," said Petrillo.

To connect Los Angeles with San Diego through Orange County, the staff recommended to use improvements to the Surfliner service on the existing LOSSAN corridor because it costs \$2.25 billion less than creating a new alignment.

The staff recommended that direct high-speed train service to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) not be part of the initial network. Instead, the high-speed train system would be connected to LAX and Western Los Angeles County by local transportation (shuttle, regional transit, or the automobile). According to staff, a direct high-speed train link to LAX requires a costly spur line with very limited maximum speeds that would have lower ridership potential than high-speed train links to San Diego (via the Inland Empire) and to Orange County.

Staff recommendations are based on ten plus years of technical studies and information discovered through the recent public comment period.

The remaining alignment corridors will be discussed at the Authority's November 10 meeting.

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